

BATTLE CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION
Special Meeting
April 20, 2015
BCCHS – McQuiston Learning Center

PRESENT - BOARD OF EDUCATION

Todd Stagner
Scott Cubberly
Kellie Thomas
Karen Evans
Catherine LaValley
Nathan Grajek
Art McClenney

Present – Administration

Dr. Linda Hicks – Superintendent
Kim Parker-DeVauld – Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Stephen Sestina –Executive Director of Human Resources
Marilyn Wieschowski – Executive Director of Financial Services
Monique Wells – Director of Student Services
Chad Osborn – Director of Technology

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Todd Stagner at 7 p.m. All board members were present. Approximately 149 citizens were in attendance including school personnel.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Karen Evans made a motion to accept the agenda. The motion was supported by Art McClenney. The agenda was unanimously approved.

Motion approved 7 – 0

Presentation by Forensics' Department

Dr. Hicks introduced Mrs. McClenney and commended her for an outstanding job she is doing at Central High School. Mrs. McClenney said that the Forensics Team had grown from 3 students to 40 students in the last 4 years. She introduced Haley Jaman, who performed a storytelling piece.

Public Comment

Jerry Ball- wanted to know if the decision to close the schools had to be made tonight. He had difficulty understanding why LaMora Park was on the list. Asked the Board to look at the figures once again.

Bobby Holley –wants to rename the gym floor at Northwestern Middle School after Al Leibert, 2007 Hall of Fame Honoree. Let him smell his flowers while he lives. Asks that a vote be placed on the next Board Meeting Agenda.

Patrick Barnett-he is a stakeholder in BCPS. He has no children. At what point was the neighborhood brought in to help make decisions? Please delay voting until stakeholders has had a chance to comment. Wants to problem solve with the Board.

Andre Washington- has kids in several different schools. His wife is at the school everyday volunteering. In Chicago, there are 40 kids to a classroom. Is that what we want to have here? The end result will be the same. It would have detrimental effects on the children. Kids should be our first priority.

Tabatha McClendon –thanked the Board because of this decision. She has been able to teach her children about peaceful protesting. They stood picketing because she felt their voice is not being heard. As parents, they refuse to be part of a District that does not put the kids first. They love LaMora Park. Sub-par parents are not present. The choices will be detrimental to your school district. Give more time to make the decision.

Josh Farrow – regarding last week's outburst – it undermines the integrity and dignity of the Board. It made the Board look foolish. I would like to call for her resignation. She is the last person I want to represent us and our children.

Melissa Nimtz – this is her 10th year teaching. Now she teaches at LaMora Park. When things come up like this, the outcome is always the same. The District does what it wants to do. The outside firm does not have vested interest in the District. Our District deserves better. Walk through each building; get a clearer picture for which school should be closed. LaMora Park would not be one of them.

Katie Boult – Support LaMora Park. It breaks her heart that the school will be closing. She grew up across the street from the school. This is a sinking ship and you need to plug the holes.

Dawn Oldenburg – She is against school closings. She dropped out of high school at the age of 16; you're taking away children's rights. You're going against the no child left behind act. We pay you, you don't pay us.

Cristina Rincón – Supports LaMora Park. Since we met last week, they held Parent/Teacher Conferences, 203 parents who reported, 94 of them said they would leave, 50 said they would go out of District, 48 would be staying and 11 were unsure.

Kristen Farrow –president of LaMora Park PTA. She provided some of the things that the PTA has done in the past – ice cream party, food for open house, purchased carpets for classrooms, meals for staff, gave each teacher \$30 for supplies, just to name a few. She believes PTA's increase student achievement.

Dre'Leah Burton – A student at Fremont. Wants to keep her school open.

Daniel Williams – Supports Coburn. He lives next to the school. Can't see where you people can close these schools. It has become a routine. You ask for mileages, we pay. We pay your wages through our taxes. He watches children after school. Keep the schools open or give back to the people and do what is right.

Abigail Good – I don't want my school to close. Did a cheer for Coburn.

Joe Ratti – Is part of every school in the District. Has seen a lot of schools close. We looked at every single aspect; union leader – represents the teachers. One of the problems is that the process is not transparent. According to them, LaMora Park was not even close to being closed. It could be expanded. Coburn is a border school, closer to Lakeview. He recommends that the board go into these schools.

Jim Haadsma – He is a Calhoun County Board Member. Basically he wanted to postpone the vote.

Meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m. for a break.

Karen Evans made a motion to reconvene. It was supported by Art McClenney. Meeting was called to order at 7:42 p.m.

Superintendent Comments

Before the Board vote, Dr. Hicks requested that Kim Parker-DeVauld show a power point presentation that explained the MEAP averages and the Priority School rankings.

Dr. Stagner wanted to know which school is a Priority School in BCPS? Kim Parker-DeVauld answered that Verona is a Priority School. Catherine LaValley want to know when a school has gone through their four years, what would that look like? Kim Parker-DeVauld said that information is not readily available. That information comes from the Federal, the Michigan Department of Education.

Dr. Hicks – so this last slide is an illustration of the Fund Balance. The red arrow shows what will happen if we do nothing (indicates State take over).

School closures are difficult and challenging. My recommendation is to close Coburn and LaMora Park.

Board Member Comments

Scott Cubberly – This is an extremely difficult decision that we should not take lightly. Discussions and decisions of our finances have been going on for years which are reflected in previous board minutes. We need to do things differently. In respect to the community at large, I join others in asking you to postpone your vote for a week, or maybe a month, to get more data because of the importance of this issue to our parents.

My motion is to postpone any decision on school closures for a period of one month.
Support by Nathan Grajek.

Discussion

Art McClenney – Last week, I stated how I was in your place not too long ago. I was angry and frustrated, just as you are. Just let me state to those of you who have remained respectful, we appreciate that. I said I would never vote to close another school. I was full of emotion and passion for Battle Creek Public Schools, just as you are. We have a declining enrollment. Battle Creek used to be an industrial city. Every school was full. This is not a Board problem. It is a community problem, and we are happy to see some of the city officials here today. This is not going to just affect Battle Creek Schools. How many of your neighbors or even the people sitting next to you send your kids to schools out of the District? Those questions have to be looked at and answered by the community. If we as a community are going to be the cornerstone, we need you to send your kids to BCPS. I think the motion to postpone for one month will give us additional help from the community. Regardless of the decision to close, someone is going to be upset. Every school should have a representative here. Let's give the community time to solve the problem.

Nathan Grajek – I would like to reiterate, you've all heard it. It's not easy. No one wants to close schools. I'm wondering if it's possible to put the last slide back up? The Fund Equity – thank you. So this is if we do nothing. The State will take over. That scares me. I don't know what the right option is, but I don't want the state to take over this District. We, on this Board, who by the way are unpaid, are entrusted to make sure the District runs the best it can. I don't want to see Rick Synder and the state government come and take-over our District. Because if you think this is bad, ask someone from one of the Districts that was named earlier. That being said, I do not think the recommendation of Dr. Hicks is the right one. For all of the reasons we've heard tonight and the last few months. Coburn Elementary is the last school in that area and we cannot give up on that part of town. LaMora Park is one of the highest tested schools, highest performing schools; the building is newer; I don't think it's a good idea to close that one. Unfortunately, I do not know which ones are the right ones. What I want to propose here; this is serious. We can't delay this forever. We're on the cusp here, we can't keep putting this off, we have to do something, but if we delay this a month, I want to see some options. I feel like options have been very, very limited. By talking to the folks that was in the committee, it's my understanding they were only given certain schools they could vote on, not all schools; and that is a concern for me. We were only given one option from Dr. Hicks and that concerns me. It doesn't give us much choice, we as a Board. I am proposing that we ask Superintendent Hicks to give more options in a month of what it would like if other schools were closed. This is a community problem. So I am asking for more options before we make our decisions.

Karen Evans – I have one concern in delaying the vote. If we are keeping the best interest of students at heart, we need the schools that are involved, whatever schools they are, they need to have time to do a transition plan. I know exactly what it feels like to have your school closed. My school was closed when my children went to Level Park. I attended Level Park, my children attended Level Park. We only had 100 kids at Level Park. I couldn't come up with a better option to save the amount of money and affect as few kids as we were going to affect by moving them to LaMora Park, but we focused on the PTA's in both schools and the staff in both schools, to get together a transition plan for families involved. We need to give the schools time to do that. I'm concerned with postponing the vote to next month, we're so close to the end of the school year, that the schools will not have time to put together a good transition plan and are we doing our students a disservice by doing that. I'm very concerned about that, number 1. Number 2, the problem isn't that we just want to close schools, because we're mean people. The problem is we have certain revenue coming into us, and that's counted per pupil and when we lose over 200 kids a year from our school district, that's a lot of money and revenue that we are losing and we can't support keeping nine elementary schools open. So what do we have to do to fix the problem? The problem is declining enrollment. We need to get together as a community and as a school district to change our talk about our schools. Let's not talk about the bad, but let's focus on what we do well. We need to turn that around and come together and support our district. My concern about extending the vote is that it will not give the schools time to do a transition plan.

Kelli Thomas – I concur with my fellow Board members to postpone. I would like to apologize for last week's comments because emotions were running high. I too sat through Washington being closed. And I told the Board, not this Board because none of them were on the Board at that time, to stop treating me, a parent, like a red-headed step-child. But I wanted to be an informed parent and decided that I would do something about what was going on. I've seen on Facebook, to keep our schools open. It commented about parents coming to show support and be your voice. It also said be a part of the solution and bring a plan of action. I am asking the entire community - parents, teachers, stake holders, community leaders at large, to please help us figure out a solution. We are in 14-15 right now. 15-16 is next year. In two years, Dr. Hicks won't be our Superintendent. Governor Rick Snyder is going to be sitting there or one of his cohorts. Our budget, 85% of that, is our reason why we have the best teachers in this district. We have to find different funding, different revenue sources, to help us supplement that budget so we have more than 15% of our budget to help make that increase. Part of that is students in the school. So please, talk to your neighbors, talk to your community – find out the reason why. There are awesome things going on in different buildings. I'm not saying we're perfect. It takes a great PTA; it takes great parents to speak the good, not the bad. We all have bad days, a single bad day cannot ruin a single year. Let's continue to talk and praise about the good things that are happening in our buildings.

Catherine LaValley – I, too, thank the Board members for their heartfelt thoughts and concerns. Yes, we are faced with a major decision and we don't want to have our District staff to think they have not done enough for us in providing all the facts, figures, charts and things. I think it is very important to take that time that the motion is talking about. but in the

spirit of taking that time, could the District still get going on kindergarten round-up? It's time to plan for next year. I realize kindergarten round-up can be on-hold for a little bit, but not much longer, and this month it is my desire to partner, collaborate, positive talk with city commissioners, parks and recreation would be important to come to the table with a conversation. We need, as a Board, a plan that when our decisions come forth, it tells our community what the next steps are. This plan can be a collaborative one. It can address our previous closed buildings, but I think it is important to provide as much information to our community stakeholders. They have done an excellent job in the last three weeks of informing us of their thoughts, their concerns. We do know that people care about this District, and that is a sense of confidence that we want to honor and respect. I just want to make Dr. Hicks' job easier. I hope we can encourage her to go forward with kindergarten round-up and it's important to do so because parents need to make plans for next year. But also in the mean time as we learn about Proposal 1's issue on May 5; as we learn about BC vision, all these are points that will be important to consider as we go forward with our decision-making. I appreciate the fact that the decision is very serious. No one likes to close a family but we want to honor our District. I like Mr. McClenney's tone of cornerstone. BCPS needs to be a strong School District for the rest of the schools in the area. We can do it, but we need to do it together as one. The unification of this District and the neat ideas of the PTA's working together I think we have some fantastic PTA's that could help the other PTA's in the other buildings as well. I'm looking forward to next month to work as hard as we can to assist the staff as they provide this information. We are thankful to the city of Battle Creek for the GIS report that we wanted to see. We received it on Friday. I think it's going to take more conversation in order to make the very best decision for a very deserving district of the kids. We all want to promote education.

Scott Cubberly – In support of my motion, Ms. Evans, I appreciate the notion that we've got to come out and make a decision. I wish we could have had the information needed to make the decision in a shorter period of time. However, I think it's the reference that the city of Battle Creek – in order for us to be vibrant, in order for the county to be vibrant, it's extremely important for BCPS to be vibrant. So in order to make that happen and start us on our way, I think we really need to come together to do that. I'd like to see an Adhoc Committee of our Board to sit down and meet with city commissioners, county commissioners, and other leaders in the city, and talk about what can be done, so they can understand our economic concerns, what we need to do, why we are forced to make these decisions and how they can help us. Bridge that gap – it doesn't mean it's funding. It is how can we work together to make a stronger BCPS. So that's my purpose in this time. I don't want it to be an empty time, and do nothing. It should be a time of action, and additionally, we should be touring every building.

Todd Stagner – Any other Board comments at this time? Okay. I do feel that this is somewhat of a reactive decision, but we can't determine year to year how many students we are going to have. I don't like to do a personal band wagon in a sense of bragging about my family, but I am going to brag about my family. I live in Battle Creek, and the middle school closed for my last son; he went to Northwestern. My wife teaches at Northwestern. I have my oldest daughter who went to BCPS accepted at U of M and attends U of M. I have my second daughter, graduating this year, accepted at U of M and Michigan State. She's

chosen Michigan State. So for people to think that BCPS isn't what it should be, I'm not allowed to swear, so we'll just leave it at that. It is truly a community in a sense that if we could get together with the City of Battle Creek, to look and see what their thoughts are on how they see this community evolving because it involves all of us. I think that it is important that as we move forward, part of what we need to see is where we are with the strategic plan. I know Dr. Hicks has been working on that and I hate to make a decision at this point without seeing how we're moving forward with this.

At the dinner Saturday night, we heard from a gentleman who graduated in 1943. He talked about walking from Battle Creek Central over to the Post community. That was his normal walk. I know things have changed greatly, in that regard, but just a thought. The GIS mapping, we just got it for the four schools. Could possibly get it for all the schools? The biggest thing again falls into this when the comment was made about the School Districts when the State takes over, it destroys the community. It's not an easy decision. In case it was not clarified, Mr. Grajek did make the comment, for those of you who did not hear it clearly, this is a non-paid position. We volunteer our time, and we do lose sleep over it. Don't think we don't. That's all I have. Thank you.

A roll call vote was taken for Scott Cubberly's motion to postpone any decision on school closures for a period of one month.

Vote:

Kelli Thomas – yes

Scott Cubberly – yes

Art McClenney – yes

Karen Evans – no

Catherine LaValley – yes

Nathan Grejak – yes

Todd Stagner – yes

Motion approved 6 - 1

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:47p.m.